



King's Research Portal

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Williams, G. (2013). A Voice of the Crowd: Futurism and the Politics of Noise. *19th-Century Music*, 37(2), 113-129.

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Advancing Knowledge, Driving Change

A Voice of the Crowd: Futurism and the Politics of Noise

Author(s): Gavin Williams

Source: *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Fall 2013), pp. 113-129

Published by: University of California Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nem.2013.37.2.113>

Accessed: 24-05-2018 15:12 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *19th-Century Music*

A Voice of the Crowd: Futurism and the Politics of Noise

GAVIN WILLIAMS

Let us cross a great modern capital, with ears more attentive than eyes, and we will enjoy picking out the eddying of water, air and gas in metallic pipes, the rumble of motors that breathe and pulse with an indisputable animality, the throbbing of valves, the back-and-forth of pistons, the screeches of mechanical saws, the bouncing of trams on rails, the cracking of whips, the fluttering of curtains and flags.
—Luigi Russolo

Thus did the Futurist painter Luigi Russolo render the everyday spectacle of noise in an early-twentieth-century metropolis. Russolo's meandering sentence remains the most oft-quoted extract from his 1913 manifesto "L'arte dei rumori" (The Art of Noises). Within months

of its initial publication, an English journalist, reading the manifesto in French translation, had already singled out the passage. It possessed, this anonymous journalist thought, "the decided virtue of constructiveness"—referring perhaps to the manifesto's arrangement, carefully held together by sonic threads.¹ This can be heard in swirling "water, air and gas" that draw

My sincere thanks to Flora Willson, Alexander Rehding, William Cheng, and Roger Parker for their dependable support during the writing of this article. The epigraph comes from Luigi Russolo, "L'arte dei rumori: Manifesto futurista" (Milan: Direzione del movimento futurista, 1913). ("Attraversiamo una grande capitale moderna, con le orecchie più attente che gli occhi, e godremo nel distinguere i risucchi d'acqua, d'aria o di gas nei tubi metallici, il borbottio dei motori che fiatano e pulsano con una indiscutibile animaltà, il palpitare delle valvole, l'andirivieni degli stantuffi, gli stridori delle seghe meccaniche, i balzi dei tram sulle rotaie, lo schioccar delle fruste, il garrire delle tende e delle bandiere.") It appears on the second page of a four-page booklet first published in 1913, a copy of which is preserved at Harvard University's Houghton Library. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹"Occasional Notes: The Art of Noise," *Musical Times* 55 (1914), 20. The author of this brief article retranslated the passage into English, taking as his source the first French translation of "L'arte dei rumori" by music editor and journalist Jules Ecorcheville; see "Le futurisme ou le bruit dans la musique," *Revue musicale de la Société internationale de musique* 7 (1913), 1–13. In this article, Ecorcheville also provides what is perhaps the first critical assessment of futurism. Another early appraisal was offered by the eminent English music critic William Henry Hadow, who considered Italian Futurism to be a trend of modern music in opposition to Schoenberg's "German School"; see his "Some Aspects of Modern Music," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915), 57–68.

us into an invisible sound world of pipes, their hydraulic pressure pushing through into rumbling motor engines with their valves and pistons. Via the screech of a mechanical saw, we emerge once again on to street level, as our crossing of the great modern capital resumes with the jolt of a tram that seems to cut across our path: we had taken our eyes off the road, perhaps, while imagining these overpowering machine noises. The invisible sources of the sounds create distraction, despite Russolo's calls to attention: the ultimate impression of the city scene is one of dizzying multiplicity.²

A century later, this literary conceit may evoke for us the more or less familiar sensory dynamics of present-day urban life. Many of the preoccupations of urban theorists from Walter Benjamin to Michel de Certeau can be found here: the city's reshaping of the sensorium; the dialectic of attention and distraction; and walking as a privileged mode of interaction with the city.³ Despite the manifesto's compact statement of what have since become distinctive urban themes, journalists in 1913 had their own reasons for quoting Russolo. For them, this passage encapsulated the Futurists' publicity technique (already familiar from Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's manifestos) in its offbeat proposal, developed throughout the manifesto, to renew concert music by means of various kinds of noise.⁴ Newspaper commentary was

marked by skepticism and irony and ranged between admiration for the Futurists' innovations, doubt about the feasibility of translating city noise into music, and preemptive bluff-calling.⁵ Was Russolo's idea an elaborate hoax? Could he really be suggesting that future music would be made of noise? Following the above quotation, Russolo went on: "We will enjoy orchestrating together perfectly the clamor of shop shutters, slamming doors, the buzz and shuffle of crowds, the various noises of stations, iron works, spinning mills, printing works, electricity stations and underground railroads."⁶ The noisy lists keep coming, but toward the end Russolo shifts from sources to resources, sites where further research might be undertaken. As he saw it, "L'arte dei rumori" was no joke, but a systematic program for the coming months, even the coming years and decades.⁷

In this article, I will focus on the years around 1913, attempting to supply a fresh historical dimension to Russolo's noisy imagination—a "visionary" aurality that, I will argue, was characteristic of Italian Futurism's broader engage-

²As Alfred Gell points out, though, the tendency to perceive sounds as invisible (or in some sense insufficient) may rest on an occulocentric bias that understands them as "hidden"; see Alfred Gell, *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams* (New York: Berg, 1999), 239–40.

³Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110; Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* [1968], trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 163–76.

⁴The journalists' weary familiarity with Futurist tactics is betrayed by comments such as the following, taken from a review of one of the first concerts of Russolo's music (discussed below): "Evidentemente la novità futurista, annunciata con il consueto lusso di manifesti vistosi, non aveva esercitato sulla cittadinanza milanese una attrattiva molto notevole. L'interesse per le rappresentazioni futuriste è dunque diminuito, sebbene sia stato sempre un interesse fatto di curiosità alimentato dal desiderio partecipare ad una serata rumorosa ed agitatissima." (Evidently, the Futurist novelty, announced by the usual overflow of garish manifestos, had not proved a particularly notable attraction for the Milanese. The interest in the Futurist performances has thus diminished, though it has always been an

interest created by curiosity and fed by the desire to participate in a *serata* that is both noisy and very agitated.) For this anonymous review, see "Serata musicale futurista: Chiassate, violenze ed arresti," *Il secolo* (22 April 1914), 3. ⁵This bluff-calling was sometimes overt: "Ma chi ha mai potuto credere un momento all'arte dei rumori e prendere sul serio i futuristi nella loro pretesa pazzesca di ricondurre la musica ai suoni naturali, intonando i rumori senza modo certo e prendendo perciò le mosse—fosse stato almeno una satira! . . . —dalle cacofonie straussiane, ultimo disperato tentativo dell'arte convenzionale esaurita in tutti i suoi mezzi abusati?!" (But who could ever have believed, even for a moment, in the *Art of Noises*; or have taken the futurists seriously in their insane pretense to trace music back to natural sounds, *intoning* the noises without a reliable means, and so taking their cue—had it at least been a satire! . . . —from Straussian cacophonies, [thus] making a final desperate attempt on an exhausted, traditional art, which has been abused in every way?!) A. Cameroni, "Il gran concerto futurista al 'Dal Verme'," *L'Italia* (22 April 1914), 3.

⁶"Ci divertiremo ad orchestrare idealmente insieme il fragore delle saracinesche dei negozi, le porte sbatracchianti, il brusio e lo scalpiccio delle folle, i diversi frastuoni delle stazioni, delle ferriere, delle filande, delle tipografie, delle centrali elettriche e delle ferrovie sotterranee." Russolo, "L'arte dei rumori: Manifesto futurista," 2.

⁷For a recent account of Russolo's activities, see Luciano Chessa, *Luigi Russolo, Futurist: Noise, Visual Arts and the Occult* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 137–96.

ment with sound.⁸ I want to excavate what might tentatively be called a Futurist ideology of noise and will do so by focusing on two of the resources listed by Russolo: the crowd on the one hand, and printing works on the other—or, more precisely, Futurist typography.⁹ Crowds and typographies can be productively explored in tandem, providing contrasting (yet connected) perspectives on noise: the one collective and illegible, the other individual and rapidly deciphered. I will spend the first part of the article listening to the noises of Futurist crowds as they appear in painting, poetry, and musical instrument building; a historical interlude will then explore late-nineteenth-century crowd psychology as a historical reading practice as it was applied to noise. Finally, I will consider the reception of the first concert that put Russolo's "L'arte dei rumori" on stage in 1914 and draw from it a historically and culturally specific notion of Futurist "rumore"—one that looks beyond Russolo's "arte" to locate noise in a critical (and uproarious) space between audience and audition.

Along the way, noise will constantly return in different guises. These will include the noises made by crowds in urban spaces that encourage imaginations of the masses, as well as the effects that noises were supposed to have on large, heterogeneous groups of people. Noise will re-

appear across diverse scenarios, including war zones, urban insurrections, and theatrical riots. But most importantly noise will feature as the unstable object of various Futurist attempts at representation (through the invention and adaptation of writing systems for inscribing noise) and remediation (by means of various modes of sound reproduction and simulation). As we will see, the discursive mobility of noise within Futurism ultimately transects this particular artistic movement, opening onto a broader historical politics of noise.

FROM CROWD TO TYPOGRAPHY: SINGING MULTITUDES

Marinetti's founding "Manifeste du Futurisme" was published on the front page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1909.¹⁰ Around the same time, he consolidated a group of artists and poets who were mostly based in Milan and were committed to Futurism's wide-ranging program for revolutionizing art and everyday life. His movement's driving force was to be the crowd: "We shall sing of the great crowds roused up by work, pleasure or rebellion; the multicolored and polyphonic waves of revolution in the modern capitals."¹¹ Marinetti's summing-up of Futurism's relation with an imagined mass public is thus awkwardly poised between popularism and agitation: the masses were tremendously powerful but lacked awareness of their own strength—a diagnosis typical of the avant-garde as it has been theorized, for example, by Matei Călinescu, who traced its roots in nineteenth-century political culture and manifestos all the way back to Marx.¹² Marinetti restated the terms of this demagogic

⁸Traditional musicological approaches to Futurism have tended (understandably) to focus solely on its leading composers, Francesco Balilla Pratella and Luigi Russolo; see, for example, Rodney Payton, "The Music of Futurism: Concerts and Polemics," *Musical Quarterly* 62 (1976), 25–45; and Mark A. Radice, "Futurismo: Its Origins, Context, Repertory, and Influence," *Musical Quarterly* 73 (1989), 1–17. However, some scholars have attempted to broaden interpretive vistas, asking what Futurism might contribute to notions of musical modernism; see, for example, Robert P. Morgan, "A New Musical Reality: Futurism, Modernism, and 'The Art of Noises,'" *Modernism/Modernity* 1 (1994), 129–51; and Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 8–10, 14. Rather than seek out Futurism's modernist legacies, however, this article broaches the topic in terms of its historical context.

⁹Futurist typography has generated a substantial scholarly literature since the 1980s. Two seminal works are: Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Politics and Poetics in Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tuuum*," *Stanford Italian Review* 5 (1985), 75–92; and Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

¹⁰"Fondation et manifeste du futurisme," *Le Figaro* (20 Feb. 1909), 1.

¹¹"Nous chanterons les grandes foules agitées par le travail, le plaisir ou la révolte; les ressacs multicolores et polyphoniques des révolutions dans les capitales modernes." Ibid.

¹²Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 108–16. On Italian Futurism's popularism and engagement with the media, see Germano Celant, "Futurism as Mass Avant-Garde," trans. John Shepley, in *Futurism and the International Avant-Garde*, ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1980), 35–42.

conundrum as aesthetics: he wanted to reimagine life through the crowd as an artistic experiment. And—in a primal scene of the artistic avant-garde that would repeat time and again—he (mis)recognized himself as a leader of the masses. Meanwhile, he formed around himself a coterie of artists who could “sing” on behalf of the multitudes. Although a conventional laudatory metaphor (one going back to Virgil’s *Aeneid*: “Arma virumque cano”—I sing of arms and of a man), it is significant that Marinetti expressed this relationship with the crowd in vocal terms: Futurism was the “music of the revolution” meant to inspire crowds to great and beautiful acts, bringing about the destruction of tradition in both society and art.¹³

The collapse of tradition was also the fantasy that animated Futurist Umberto Boccioni’s *Rissa in Galleria* (“Brawl in the Galleria,” 1910; plate 1), a painting that, like Marinetti’s manifesto, harbored a dynamic ambiguity of celebration/agitation in relation to the crowd. The figures in this painting, especially the women in their colorful dresses, seem to dance through Milan’s Galleria Vittorio Emanuele; yet the image as a whole offered the bourgeois spectator an unflattering portrait of the customary pre- (or post-) theater stroll. *Rissa in Galleria* represents the social unrest of the Giolittian era, in which socialist demonstrations were a familiar sight in large cities.¹⁴ However, Boccioni depicts middle-class pleasure-seekers rather than workers. The scene unfolds outside the Caffè Campari, situated along the Galleria facing the piazza del Duomo, which was a regular meeting place for the Futurists. A skirmish between competing prostitutes—one wearing green, the other blue, bent toward each other with arms locked in combat—provokes moral indignation among the well-to-do public out-

side the Caffè.¹⁵ Beneath the electric lamps, surrounded by the darkness of the evening, the portico is lit up like a stage, making a spectacle of the scandal. Men swarm toward the prostitutes, whether to observe, intervene, or participate. Many wear boater hats—a period emblem adopted by the Futurists in their public personas—and evening dress: against the illuminated backdrop, their bodies, and their shadows, stand out like letters on a page.

However, Boccioni’s *Rissa in Galleria* not only represents the crowds of Marinetti’s “Manifeste du Futurisme” but also enacts the outbreak of the fight. In the foreground, a man leaps forward, his arms flung in the air.¹⁶ He presents a strong gesture and also a hieroglyph: his body makes the shape of a letter Y, which curves to the right as if to form an E—perhaps to stand in for the missing È of CAFFÈ. Boccioni’s concealment of this È pushes it into the auditory unconscious of the image, where it is joined by the vowel sound of the man in the foreground, whose mouth forms an O. These zones of the canvas are thus charged with a sonic currency that invites further virtual soundings from the crowd’s shouting and screaming, and from the footsteps of those hurrying toward the fight. In other words, the painting maps the sounds (as well as the sights) of a crowd brought to life by typography and alphabetic gestures.

Through its multimedia symbols, *Rissa in Galleria* offers a vista onto what we might call

¹³The phrase “music of the Revolution” is attributed to the poet Alexander Blok, whose writings were important for the Russian Futurists; see Alexander Zholkovsky, *Text Counter Text: Readings in Russian Literary History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 288.

¹⁴Martin Clark briefly discusses this painting in the context of a “Revolt of the Intellectuals” in his *Modern Italy, 1871–1995* (London: Longman, 1996), 173–76.

¹⁵Christine Poggi discusses the painting’s narrative in *Inventing Futurism: The Art and Politics of Artificial Optimism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 65–66; also 285, n. 27. Meanwhile, Clara Orban mentions the significance of the caffè as a site of confrontation in Boccioni’s work in *The Culture of Fragments: Words and Images in Futurism and Surrealism* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997), 70–71.

¹⁶The image invokes contemporary Futurist theatrical practice, in which striking gestures featured the rigid extension of limbs, projecting alphabetic signals. Consider, for example, Marinetti’s choreographic advice to a would-be Futurist performer: “Gesticulate geometrically, thus making the arms entirely rigid like railway signals or lighthouse beams to point out the direction of the movement of forces or of pistons or wheels, to express the dynamic nature of Words-in-Freedom”; see Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Dynamic, Multichanneled Recitation” (1916), trans. Doug Thompson, in F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 195.

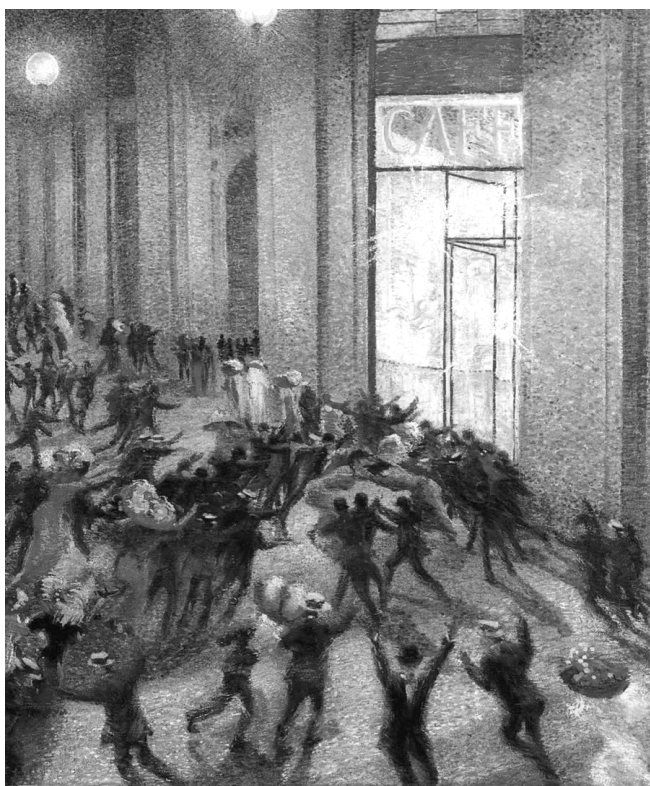


Plate 1: Umberto Boccioni's *Rissa in Galleria* ("Brawl in the Galleria," 1910).

the sensory dynamic of crowd experience. Its arrangement of the visual, auditory, and tactile presents what Jacques Rancière would call a "distribution of the sensible": the networked, economic, political interplay between the senses that may seem "self-evident" for a certain historical period.¹⁷ The scandalous visibility of the prostitutes, exposed as they are by electric lighting, "self-evidently" gives rise to crowd violence, while the acoustic properties of the Galleria provide a reverberant space for the crowd noises. What is more, the order of these noises depends in part on how we choose to navigate the painting. Do we heed the exhortation of the figure in the foreground and turn away? In that case, the interpellation of the figure's voice has

already swept us into the crowd's dynamic (albeit negatively, as a person about to flee). Another option might be to ignore him and look beyond—to the crowd, which beckons all the same. Perhaps the painting's elevated perspective then feels more secure, the brightly lit overhead spaces more permanent; yet the murmur of the crowd slowly rises, shouting voices begin to echo. Whichever way we look, noise sparks the crowd's magnetic power to attract, alarm, and excite bodies.

FROM TYPOGRAPHY TO CROWD: REWORKING NOISE

Marinetti delivered the title words of his notorious cycle of poems *Zang Tumb Tumb* (1914) into a phonograph in 1924.¹⁸ To re-create his

¹⁷Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 12. For a compelling exploration of Rancière's ideas in terms of a history of aurality, see Sophia Rosenfeld, "On Being Heard: A Case for Paying Attention to the Historical Ear," *American Historical Review* 116 (2011), 316–34.

¹⁸Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb* (Milan: Poesia, 1914); a recording made by Marinetti on 30 April 1924 has been reissued in Daniele Lombardi, *Musica futurista*, 8 CDs (Vicenza: Cramps, 2010).

attempt at cannon fire, attack the z of *Zang* and then—following a slight breath—pronounce *Tumb* and then *Tuum* in rapid succession, drawing out at will the latter's three *us*. These sounds appear in "Bombardamento," *Zang Tumb Tumb*'s final poem, which immediately became Futurism's audible signature. Marinetti wrote the poem while working for the Paris newspaper *Gil Blas* as a reporter on the First Balkan War in 1912; he had been greatly impressed by new battlefield technologies, including aerial and shell warfare (both of which would become distinctive features of the First World War). By incorporating these sounds into poems, he sought to communicate the experience of modern warfare and, by extension, intense experience of various other kinds:

Suppose that a friend of yours, endowed with this lyric faculty, finds himself in an area of intense life (revolution, war, shipwreck, earthquake, etc.) and immediately afterwards tells you of his impressions. Do you know what your friend, if lyrical and moved, will instinctively do?

He will shun polish and transitions, and he will, in a rush, throw frantically into your nerves his visible, auditory, and olfactory sensations, according to their own pressing current.¹⁹

This was the inspiration behind Marinetti's theory of what he called *parole in libertà*, or "words in freedom." Through them, he sought to break with any sense of linguistic syntax by leaving verbs in the infinitive, avoiding punctuation and developing various typographical strategies such as mixed typefaces, font sizes, character spacing, and alignment—all interspersed with regular parenthetical directions, borrowed from performance instructions in music, to read faster or (infrequently) slower.²⁰

¹⁹"Supponete che un amico vostro dotato di questa facoltà lirica si trovi in una zona di vita intensa (rivoluzione, guerra, naufrago, terremoto, ecc.) e venga, immediatamente dopo, a narrarvi le impressioni avute. Sapete che cosa farà istintivamente questo vostro amico lirico e commosso?"

"Disprezzerà cesellature e sfumature e in fretta vi getterà affannosamente nei nervi le sue sensazioni visive, auditive, olfattive, secondo la loro corrente incalzante." Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, 10.

²⁰We should beware of taking Marinetti at his word, however. While punctuation is avoided, graphics replace them as syntactic markers. See Perloff, *The Futurist Moment*, 60.

When *Zang Tumb Tumb* was later printed as a book, the document served as an advertisement for his own virtuoso recitations, given in theater tours across Italy and the rest of Europe.²¹

Marinetti's international publicity campaign had as its goal the seduction of audiences—typically figured as a crowd—to the aesthetics of war. Around the time of the Balkan War, as well as the 1911 Italo-Turkish War preceding it, Marinetti (along with many others) promoted battle as a means of national regeneration.²² To lure both Italians and foreigners to war's ideal beauty, Marinetti appealed to poetry's sound: onomatopoeia (always valorized in his exegeses of *parole in libertà*) operated on a sensory level, throwing images and sounds "frantically into the nerves," inducing a sensory overload that would ideally give rise to "body madness" in listeners.²³ These sounds, along with *Zang Tumb Tumb*'s pro-war narrative, drew listeners of "Bombardamento" into a real-time experience: "every 5 seconds siege cannons to gut space with a chord ZANG-TUMB-TUUMB mutiny of 500 echoes snapping it shredding it scattering it into infinity. . . . Down down at the bottom of the orchestra ponds to splash oxen buffaloes prods carts pluff plaff rear themselves up with horses flic flac zing zing sciaaack

²¹See Günter Berghaus, *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (New York: de Gruyter, 2000), 67, 474; and Schnapp, "Politics and Poetics in Marinetti's *Zang Tumb Tuuum*," 77.

²²It was against this belligerent backdrop that Renato Poggioli understood Futurism and its "agonistic" aesthetics. In his words, "l'attitudine agonica non è stato d'animo passivo, dominato esclusivamente dal senso d'un'imminente catastrofe, ma, al contrario, tentativo di trasformare in miracolo quella stessa catastrofe" (the agonistic attitude is not a passive state of mind, exclusively dominated by a sense of imminent catastrophe, but, on the contrary, an attempt to transform that catastrophe into a miracle). See his *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (Bologna: Mulino, 1962), 81.

²³For more on "Body Madness," see Marinetti's manifesto "The Variety Theater," published in the *Daily Mail* (29 Sept. 1913) and reprinted in F. T. Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 190. Robert Michael Brain points out a fascinating connection between "body madness" and late-nineteenth-century cabaret culture, and the particular relevance in this context of onomatopoeia, as a linguistic technique for exciting audiences. See his "Genealogy of 'Zang Tumb Tumb': Experimental Phonetics, Vers Libre, and Modernist Sound Art," *Grey Room* 43 (2011), 88–117.

cheerful neighs ìììì. . . ."²⁴ The poem opens with the temporal index—"every 5 seconds"—which means that, after that first "Zang-Tumb-Tuuumb" (followed by prolonged silence in Marinetti's 1924 recording), the clock is ticking: it will be a matter of seconds before the next cannonball is fired. The alliterative after-shocks of "lo" scatter toward "infinito," whose final "i" Marinetti elongated, allowing it to descend parabolically like a falling shell. Sound effects such as these, taking place against the poem's internal timeline, aimed to report intense experience in its raw, undigested form.

Marinetti's poetic innovations, in turn, provided the trigger for Russolo's alternative transcription of noise into music. In "L'arte dei rumori," Russolo explained that there was an exact parallel between *parole in libertà* and what he wanted to attempt next: the building of *intonarumori*, or "noise intoners." Two well-known photographs (one of which is reproduced in plate 2) show the dimensions of the devices he eventually made: large, oblong boxes with flared horns and—journalists tell us—brightly painted cases; inside, a string vibrated either through friction against a cog or percussively against a drumbeater.²⁵ Their mechanisms were powered by electric motors or external hand cranks, while pitch was controlled by a lever, allowing for a range of nearly two octaves.²⁶ By the time Russolo first presented these instruments at a "Gran concerto futurista per *Intonarumori*" in April 1914, an entire orchestra had been built, with tenor, baritone, and bass models.²⁷

²⁴"Ogni 5 secondi cannoni da assedio sventrare spazio con un accordo ZANG-TUMB-TUUUMB ammutinamento di 500 echi per azzannarlo sminuzzarlo sparpagiarlo all'infinito . . . giù giù in fondo all'orchestra stagni diguazzare buoi bufali pungoli carri pluff plaff impennarsi di cavalli flic flac zing zing sciaaack ilari nitriti ìììì." Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tuuum*, 35.

²⁵This photograph had been published as early as 1913; see Ecorcheville, "Le futurisme ou le bruit dans la musique," 8–9.

²⁶Russolo's official patent for an "intonatore dei rumori" (intoner of noises) of January 1914 gives further technical information on how the instruments functioned. See Gianfranco Maffina, *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori: Con tutti gli scritti musicali* (Torino: Martano, 1978), 178–79.

²⁷Their first efforts were reported on 1 July 1913 in an article published in the Florence-based Futurist journal *Lacerba*. They had by that stage built four *intonarumori*: "Il primo dà il rumore *Scoppio*, tipo motore d'automobile;

One interpretative key to understanding the sonic affinities between Russolo's *intonarumori* orchestra and Marinetti's poetry can be inferred from a remark made by the former when he expanded his manifesto into a book in 1916. Here Russolo draws our attention to the First International Congress of Experimental Phonetics held at Hamburg in 1914: the significance of this event lay, he argued, in giving scientific status to Marinetti's Futurist intuition that "in nature or in life, there exists no noise—however strange and bizarre in timbre—which cannot through consonants be given a sufficiently exact (indeed, at times, very exact) imitation."²⁸ Whereas vowels provided melodious sounds, consonants were language's noisy interruptions—much like the grating cogs and the glitch-inducing motors inside Russolo's *intonarumori*. By attending to their phonemic underpinnings, therefore, Russolo's noise intoners could be understood as, at base, machines of the alphabet.²⁹

The layered streams of consonants unleashed by Russolo's *intonarumori* orchestra suggest a further kinship with Marinetti's *parole in libertà*: a genetic resemblance that depends on a scientific practice already widely diffuse within European cultures by the time Futurism came

il secondo dà il *Crepitio*, tipo fucileria; il terzo dà il *Ronzio*, tipo dinamo; il quarto dà diverse varietà di *Stropicci*." (The first gives the noise *Bang*, like a car engine; the second gives a *Crackle*, like a fusillade; the third, a gives a *Buzz*, like a dynamo; the fourth gives various types of *Scrapes* [emphases in original].) Meanwhile, four additional models were under construction: "rombatore" (rumbler), "tuonatore" (thunderer), "scrosciante" (roarer), and "gorgogliatore" (gurgler). Russolo also claimed that research into further noises—whistling (*sibili*), screeching (*stridori*), and cracking (*fruscii*)—was already complete. See his "Gl'intonarumori futuristi: Arte dei rumori," *Lacerba* (1 July 1913), 140–41. Although none of the *intonarumori* survives, there have been many attempted reconstructions. For example, see the instruments sampled in Daniele Lombardi's *Musica futurista*.

²⁸Maffina, *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori*, 154.

²⁹For an alternative reading of the instruments, see Kahn *Noise, Water, Meat*, 8–10. Kahn suggests that, though Russolo rejected "imitation" of noises, his approach to sound rehearsed a set of concerns familiar from phonography: both devices were byproducts of a more general attempt during the late nineteenth century to capture sonic reality. By contrast, Luciano Chessa argues that Russolo meant to explore noises for their spiritual value, as a means of transport to an occult world; see *Luigi Russolo, Futurist*, 137–50.

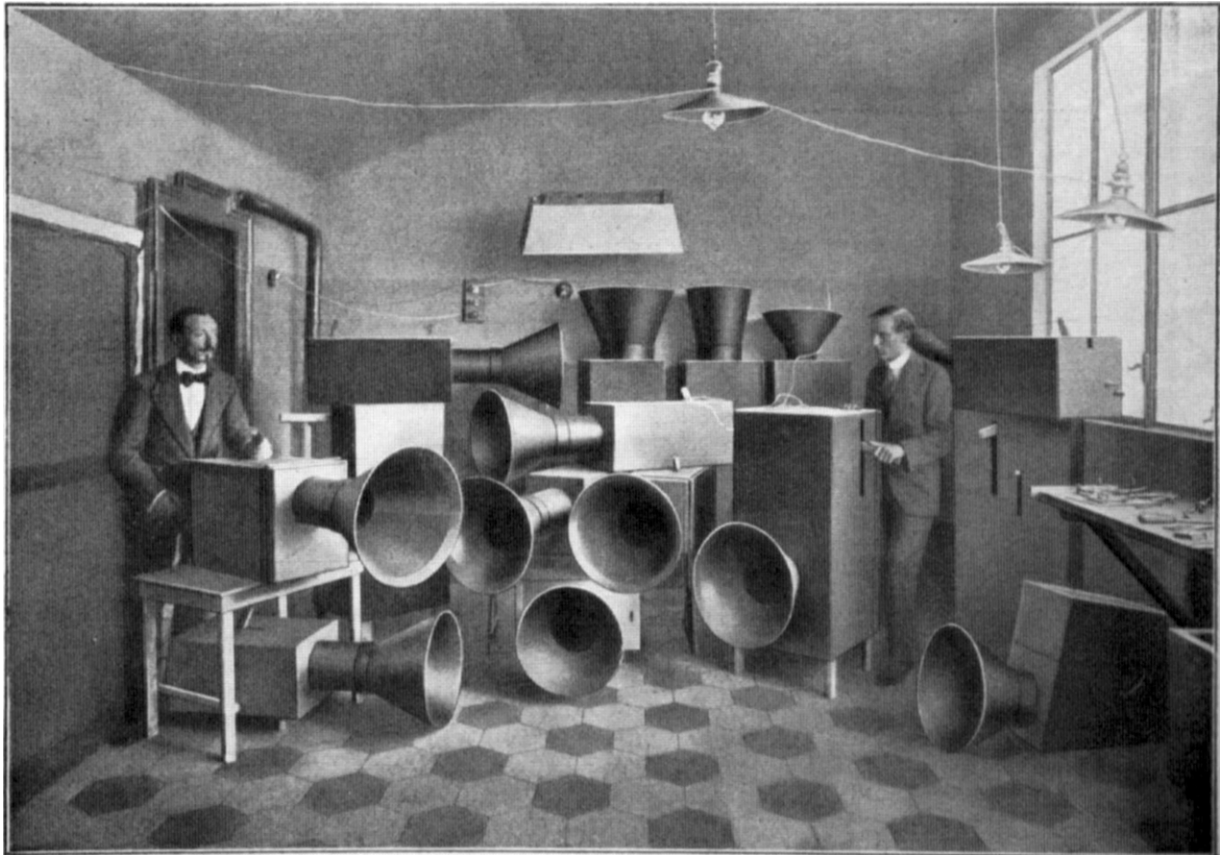


Plate 2: Russolo's *intonarumori*, or "noise intoners."

about, but whose significance is suggested by Marinetti's regular appeal to the masses. To wit: late-nineteenth-century crowd psychology offers us a framework—a historical reading practice—against which to reconstruct Futurism's twisting vortex of noises, letters, and human figures. By the century's end, crowd psychologists such as Scipio Sighele and Gustav Le Bon had published sensationally popular books that stimulated energetic reflection on precisely Marinetti's theme: the mechanism by which human assemblies might become an agitated mob.³⁰ But crowd psychology wove its own resonant threads among its imagined multitudes—threads that can tell us more about Futurism and its politics of noise.

³⁰Scipio Sighele, *La folla delinquente* (Turin: Bocca, 1895); Gustave LeBon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris: Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine, 1895).

COLLECTIVE SUBJECTS

"An emotion of alarm and anger is communicated from one individual to the next. Each individual, moved by that sudden, rapid impression, will dash outside and will follow the general impetus; he will even rush after the first person who comes in preference to the one who flees. Every animal is stimulated by movement. Therefore, all that remains to say is how emotions are communicated to the entire mass. By the lone spectacle, we answer, of an aroused individual."³¹ The anonymous subject of this

³¹"Une émotion d'alarme et de colère se communique d'un individu à l'autre. Chaque individu, remué soudain par cette impression rapide, s'élancera au dehors et suivra l'élan général; il se précipitera même sur la première personne venue de préférence sur celle qui fuit. Tous les animaux sont entraînés par l'aspect du mouvement. Il ne reste donc plus qu'à dire comment les émotions se communiquent à toute la masse. Par le seul spectacle, répondons-nous, d'un individu irrité." Alfred Espinas, *Des Sociétés animales*:

passage, the “individual,” is not a human being but a bee—and then many bees, multiplying and proliferating from one sentence to the next. These bees are among the many nonhuman protagonists of Alfred Espinas’s *Of the Society of Animals* (1877), a voluminous compendium of diverse species and a seminal work of comparative animal psychology. Although not formally included in Espinas’s animal community, humans do receive occasional mention, for example during his discussion of the wasp. “We,” as humans, “do not think solely with our brains,” but with

our entire nervous system, and the image, invading suddenly—by means of the perceiving sense—in the organs that ordinarily correspond to perception, inevitably provokes the appropriation of movements, which only an energetic counter-order may suspend. The weaker the concentration of thought, the more impetuously such movements, brought about in this way, follow their course. Our wasps, seeing one of their number enter the nest and then leave again in rapid flight, will all be swept outside, and to the noise produced by the first, a common buzz will respond in unison. From there: a general effervescence in all members of the society.³²

The narrative is straightforward: one wasp, standing guard, observes another enter and then rapidly leave the nest; the first wasp responds to this sight by flying/buzzing. This action proves irresistible to the other wasps, which immediately respond in noisy chorus. These insects have powers of concentration too weak to issue an “energetic counter-order” that would prevent this chain reaction—unlike human crowds, which, Espinas implies, can suppress the herd instinct through conscious effort.

The second Espinas extract was cited by

Sighele at a crucial moment in the development of his ideas about the human crowd. For him, it provided a model of the mimetic dynamic within a collective: an outrageous gesture or a sudden raised voice (or even a whistle), if sufficiently impressive, could precipitate general panic in a large group. Much depended on the circumstances under which this group was assembled—whether in a public space, in a theater, or, particularly important for Sighele, in parliament—as well as the number of people involved and the relationships between them.³³ One of the most basic conditions, which Sighele nevertheless deemed worthy of mention, was that a crowd’s constituent actors should be of the same species, which for his purposes meant human. But for animation to occur, the assembled individuals must not be too alike, since a homogeneous crowd tends to be bound together by links that are organic and stable and thus less likely to fragment. By contrast, Sighele argued that a heterogeneous crowd, made up of diverse social classes or nationalities, was more easily spooked and, as a consequence, more prone to violent acts. Under these circumstances, powers of mental concentration were weakened and the mass began to fuse: they became, in other words, as susceptible to mimetic suggestion as Espinas’s wasps.

This understanding of crowds as analogous to insects, and especially to wasps and bees, became an emblem of Sighele’s crowd psychology. When a shorter compilation of his more accessible essays was published, an illustration of a swarm of bees appeared on the front cover: an image that stressed more positive aspects of crowd behavior, such as cooperation.³⁴ At the same time, this apian logo made Sighele’s indebtedness to Espinas explicit, as did his work’s positivist leanings. As a scientific

Étude de psychologie comparée (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1878), 359.

³²“Tout notre système nerveux, et l’image envahissant d’emblée, avec les sens qui perçoit, les organes qui correspondent d’ordinaire à la perception, y provoque inévitablement des mouvements appropriés qu’un contre-ordre énergétique peut seul parvenir à suspendre. Plus la concentration de la pensée est faible, plus les mouvements nés de cette sorte suivent impétueusement leur cours. Nos guêpes voyant l’une des leurs entrer dans le nid, puis en sortir d’un vol rapide, seront donc elles-mêmes tirées au dehors, et au bruit produit par elle, leur bourdonnement répondra à l’unisson. De là une effervescence générale de tous les membres de la société.” Ibid., 360.

³³For Sighele, the number required for a crowd was three. However, Sighele’s other major work, *La coppia criminale* (The Criminal Couple), dealt with the influence of one individual over another. For a discussion of Sighele’s psychology of couples, see Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 64–96.

³⁴By this time Sighele was heralding the crowd as the “great moral improvement of mankind”; see Scipio Sighele, *L’intelligenza della folla* (Turin: Piccola biblioteca di scienze moderne, 1911).

method, positivism was perhaps most easily identifiable in Sighele's trans-species analogy; but it was also inherent in broader intellectual operations. For example, his opinion (shared with Espinas) that the formation of a crowd could be traced back to the "lone spectacle of an aroused individual" relied on a retrospective explanation that sought to identify a single cause.³⁵ However, this cause could not be empirically verified: Sighele lamented the fact that the crowd in motion eluded him in its audiovisual complexity, but he nonetheless hoped that his hypotheses would be borne out in the fullness of time.³⁶

Under these aggravated conditions for scientific observation, Sighele marshaled witnesses of crowd behavior from literature. He drew extensively on contemporary French writers, including Hugo, Flaubert, and Maupassant—although, as Walter Benjamin observed in a well-known essay on Baudelaire, the crowd had been a preoccupation of French literature throughout the nineteenth century.³⁷ For Benjamin, these literary stagings of the crowd reflected a growing mass readership, as well as the new sensations offered by the experience of urban crowds. What interested Sighele, meanwhile, was how anonymous individuals came to form a single body with distinct characteristics. He found confirmation of this phenomenon in an observation by Gabriel Tarde: "Incoherence becomes cohesion, *confused noise becomes a distinct voice* and, suddenly, those thousand men, at first divided by feelings and ideas, form nothing more than a single and unique person, an anonymous and monstrous beast, which rushes toward its goal with irresistible purpose."³⁸ This

completed the trajectory begun by the "lone spectacle of an aroused individual," which finally becomes an "anonymous and monstrous beast." For Sighele, this beast was the "spirit of the crowd"—something that could be seen and heard: "we see a unity of action and goal in the midst of the infinite variety of its movements, and we hear a single note—if I may put it in these terms—among the discord of its thousands of voices."³⁹ However, Sighele could not accept Tarde's final clause that the crowd had a goal and made plans. Instead, it was unconscious, dominated by uncontrollable and irrational desires—a necessary insight for Sighele's crowd psychology, which thus provided him with a subject to analyze.

A similar set of concerns—centered on the unwieldy collective subject—can be found in Marinetti's earliest plays, poems, and journal articles. To cite an obvious example that provides a route back to Futurism, in 1900 Marinetti published an article on the series of devastating riots that shook Italy in 1898, culminating in several days of violent clashes between demonstrators and the police on the streets of Milan. He had witnessed the Milan riots from the mobile vantage point of his car; his account, interspersed with ellipses, sped from one location to the next: "One saw that such defiance and alarm was going to spread to others. . . . We crossed the railway bridge. This quarter, highly populated, was in turmoil. The car stopped several times. From the carriages, I could see eyes burning with enthusiasm and hatred, eyes blinded by red visions of 1848."⁴⁰ He then drove on to the Pirelli factory, where a

³⁵Sighele, *La folla delinquente*, 51–53.

³⁶His anticipation and deferral of experimental confirmation have been singled out by historians of science as a more general trait of nineteenth-century positivism. See Russell Keat and John Urry, *Social Theory as Science* (London: Routledge, 1975), 58–59.

³⁷As Walter Benjamin put it: "The crowd—no subject was more entitled to the attention of nineteenth-century writers"; Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 166. Building on Benjamin's insight, Stefan Jonsson traces the "invention of the masses" back to the French Revolution in *Crowds*, ed. Jeffrey Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 47–75.

³⁸"L'incoerenza diventa coesione, *il rumore confuso diventa voce distinta* e, d'un tratto, quel migliaio d'uomini primi divisi di sentimenti e di idee, non forma più che una sola e

unica persona, una belva innominata e mostruosa, che corre al suo scopo con una finalità irresistibile" (cited in Sighele, *La folla delinquente*, 31). Tarde's original can be found in *La Philosophie pénale* (Paris: Storck, 1903), 324 (emphasis added).

³⁹Sighele, *La folla delinquente*, 32.

⁴⁰"On voit par là quelle défiance et quelles alarmes allaient être répandues à l'étranger. . . . Nous passâmes sous le pont du chemin de fer. Ce quartier, très populeux, était en effervescence. La voiture s'arrêta plusieurs fois. Des yeux brûlants d'enthousiasme et de haine m'apparurent aux carreaux, des yeux éblouis par les rouges visions de 1848." Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Les Emeutes milanaises de mai 1898," *La Revue blanche* 22 (15 Aug. 1900), 566. Christine Poggi discusses Marinetti's early writings, including the previously cited article, in *Inventing Futurism*, 66. On Marinetti's intellectual influences prior to

workers' protest was under way. The police and the army were attempting to suppress the demonstration; skirmishes erupted. In an effort to calm the crowd, the socialist politician Filippo Turati addressed the workers, warning them not to become victims of the army. Later, as the police began to retreat, a smaller crowd gathered and began jeering, whistling, and throwing stones: this group became the object of a counterattack by the police, during which two people died and seven were injured, while Marinetti escaped with a smashed car window.

The most dramatic episode was yet to come in Marinetti's account: "At eight in the evening, in the vast piazza del Duomo, all lit up by tiny electric moons, a human tide flooded in, bristling with fists brandished and roaring."⁴¹ The army and police tried in vain to stop them from entering the Galleria. "Shouts resound from various sides. The order is given to attack the crowd."⁴² Amid the commotion an anonymous young socialist yelled: "We are the avant-garde of humanity. . . . We must give the example of our courage to Italy."⁴³ In the end, revolutionary passions were quelled by the weather: the sky, described as "an emotional old drunkard," whose "huge tears" rained down on the riot, brought proceedings to a mournful close.⁴⁴

Though it may seem that we are a long way from positivist crowd psychology—Marinetti's electric moons and his image of the sky, drunken and sobbing, might appear to have more to do with French symbolism than insect-based explanations of human behavior—there are undeniable parallels between his article and Sighele's crowd psychology. First, gestures of alarm ("eyes blinded by red visions of

1848") spread mimetically from one person to the next, resulting in a collective anger. Second, Turati's speech provides an energetic "counter-order"—one that proves insufficient: when a smaller group breaks off, boos and whistles break out among them, provoking their risky attack on the police. Finally, Marinetti's "human tide, bristling with fists brandished" reads a unity of action within multiplicity, Sighele's condition for an emergent "spirit of the crowd." Within such a crowd, human voices signify differently: above all, the power of their impact is prized for its ability to influence mood and direction. Sheer gestural strength forms the basis of both Sighele's and Marinetti's understanding of crowds, pointing to a more socially diffuse reading practice in which the crowd is rendered legible through vocal or bodily signals.

Within this systematic understanding of crowds, noise operates on various levels. As we have seen, a punctual noise could give the incendiary gesture that brought the crowd into being in the first place. But once the crowd had been formed, noises—particularly human, vocal ones—could also direct and transform its character. The meanings of these various noises for the crowd were bound to their context and immediate consequences (and, even when vocal, they did not need to draw attention to themselves via material signifiers, as did Marinetti's later *parole in libertà*). In another sense, though, crowd noise was also the larger domain in which multiple noisy gestures combined to form a single voice (or as Sighele put it, "a single note"): in other words, the awesome murmuring of a collective unconscious.

RECEIVED AND MISUNDERSTOOD

On 21 April 1914, Russolo gave his first concert for an orchestra of *intonarumori*: his previously mentioned "Gran concerto futurista." However, as one newspaper observed, the most vital ingredient of an evening of Futurist entertainments was lacking: the audience was sparse.⁴⁵ Or, as the same report went on to

Futurism, see Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944* (Providence: Berghahn, 1996), 15–46.

⁴¹"Vers huit du soir, sur la vaste place du Dôme, toute incendiée de petites lunes électriques, un marée humaine, hérissée de poings brandis et de clameurs, déferlait." Marinetti, "Les Emeutes milanaises de mai 1898," 566.

⁴²"Des claironnées résonnent de divers côtés. Ordre est donnée d'attaquer la foule." Ibid., 567.

⁴³"Nous sommes à l'avant-garde de l'humanité. . . . Nous devons donner l'exemple de notre courage à l'Italie." Ibid.

⁴⁴The full quotation reads: "Le ciel, comme un vieil ivrogne attendri, commença à pleurer de grosses larmes. La foule, à la dérive, se jeta vers le théâtre de la Scala. Mais le ciel pleurait de plus en plus, par sanglots." Ibid.

⁴⁵"Serata musicale futurista," 3.

clarify, unevenly distributed: "The boxes were full, and there were reasonable numbers in the stage boxes. But the stalls were half empty, while the gallery certainly did not give the impression of a great occasion."⁴⁶ With the audience thus conventionally described, the review went on to give a detailed order of proceedings: first up was Marinetti, who unveiled the *intonarumori* by reading passages from "L'arte dei rumori" (a lackluster start, since the public was already familiar with Russolo's project by means of "the usual overflow of garish manifestos"). Next, the curtain rose to reveal Russolo's inventions: "The instruments are arranged in a semicircle at the back of the stage, staring at the audience with their mouths of metal. They are types of boxes on which is placed a little stand for music; the mouths of metal are nearly all the same shape. In the middle of the stage stands the conductor, Luigi Russolo, who receives his first tribute of flowers thrown from the fourth box on the left by a group of futurist women."⁴⁷ These identically dressed *signorine futuriste* lean from their boxes to applaud Russolo's instruments, while (eighteen) metal mouths, suddenly revealed, stare back at the audience. When Russolo at long last picks up the baton for his first composition (a "spiral of noise" entitled "Awakening of a City"), the anticipation is great. Yet the *intonarumori* strike a peculiar note: "a long, monotonous, and indefinable sound spreads through the theater."⁴⁸

Under the spell of the *intonarumori*'s first sounds, the moment dilates. But then the effect suddenly wears off: "The first shouts, the first ironic comments, the first jeering voices come from the spectators. The crowd begins its

own show; it shouts, sings, laughs, cackles."⁴⁹ The irony of crowd noise drowning out the *intonarumori* was not lost on this reviewer. At the same time, the satirical tone enabled a suture between on- and offstage noises—a linking technique pushed further in another of the evening's reviews:

Behind the instruments stands the player, who has the job of turning a handle in time with the music to generate the noise. With the wheels turning like this, they looked like musical knife grinders. But no one could hear a thing. The public was absolute in its intolerance. One could make out a buzz here, a rumble there, then everything merged with the greater noise of the public, which was shouting and whistling. Who knows what they were whistling, as from that moment on no one heard anything. They whistled because they whistled. Art for art's sake. The painter Russolo continued imperturbably to conduct his orchestra of musical mouths of fire [i.e., cannons], the performers continued to turn their wheels, but the public continued to overwhelm all noises. And those that had gone to the Dal Verme with the intention of listening to the futurist concert, whatever it might have been, had to resign themselves to listening to that of the public.⁵⁰

Phonographic mouths that stared at the audience in *Il secolo*'s review here emit flames. The substitution may not be incidental: according to crowd theorist Elias Canetti, fire is a pervasive metaphor for alarmed crowds in West-

⁴⁶"I palchi erano occupati e discretamente frequentate erano le barcaccie. Ma la platea appariva semivuota, mentre la galleria non presentava certo l'aspetto delle grandi occasioni." Ibid.

⁴⁷"Gli strumenti stanno disposti in semicerchio sul fondo del palcoscenico guardando il pubblico con le loro bocche di metallo. Sono specie di cassette sulle quale sovrasta un piccolo leggìo per la musica; le bocche metalliche hanno tutte una forma pressoché uguale. Nel mezzo del palcoscenico vi è il posto del direttore, Luigi Russolo, che riceve un primo omaggio di fiori lanciati dal quarto palco di sinistra da un gruppo di signorine futuriste." Ibid.

⁴⁸"Un suono lungo, monotono, indefinibile si diffonde nel teatro." Ibid.

⁴⁹"Partono dagli spettatori le prime grida, i primi accenti ironici, le prime voci di canzonatura. La folla comincia lo spettacolo suo; urla, canta, ride, schiamazza." Ibid.

⁵⁰"Dietro allo strumento sta il suonatore, il quale ha l'ufficio di girare a tempo di musica una manovella per suscitare il rumore. A vederli girare le ruote così essi apparivano come degli arrotini della musica. Ma non ci fu verso di poter sentire niente. Il pubblico fu di una intolleranza incondizionata. Si percepì qualche ronzio, qualche brontolio, poi tutto si confuse nel più grande rumore del pubblico che urlava e fischiava. Che cosa fischiava, dal momento che non si sentiva nulla, non si sa bene. Fischia per fischiare. L'arte per l'arte. Il pittore Russolo continuò imperturbabile a dirigere la sua orchestra di bocche da fuoco musicali, i professori continuarono nel loro giramento di ruote, ma il pubblico continuò a soverchiare tutti i rumori. E coloro che erano andati al Dal Verme con l'intenzione di ascoltare il concerto futurista, qualunque fosse, dovettero rassegnarsi ad ascoltare quello del pubblico." "Dal Verme, Gli 'intonarumori futuristi': Un concerto finito a pugni," *Corriere della sera* (22 April 1914).

ern culture, an association coming from the dreaded exclamation of “fire!” in theaters, which has for centuries precipitated stampedes for the exit.⁵¹ At the Dal Verme, imagined flames were slower burning: mouths that stared back uncannily at the audience in *Il secolo* were here caught up in feedback loops of rising psychological temperature. The orchestral players cranked their wheels as Russolo conducted. Meanwhile, the crowd “whistled because they whistled”—for no apparent cause except for the pleasure of doing so. The *Corriere* reviewer left open the issue of who was responding to what, allowing the spectacle to migrate from the stage to the auditorium.

Despite the audience competition, Russolo continued to conduct, eventually reaching his third and penultimate “spirale di rumore” (noise spiral), entitled “Convegno di automobili ed aeroplani” (Conference of Cars and Airplanes). According to *Il secolo*, it was during this piece that fighting broke out in the auditorium, when a young man threatened to throw chairs onto the stage, prompting Marinetti’s descent to the front row, followed by a “sortie” of Futurists, including Carrà, Boccioni, and Mazza, in order to confront the offender. This precipitated a free-for-all in which Carrà and Boccioni were injured and Marinetti was seized by the *carabinieri*. *Il secolo* thus gave the impression that after seats became airborne, the concert disintegrated. However, the *Corriere* remembered things otherwise: according to this account, the provocation was supplied by Russolo’s appearance on stage, alongside his Futurist colleagues, offering impertinent smiles of thanks after the music had finished. Perhaps it should be no surprise that when they narrated the evening’s events, these two reviews described the outbreak of violence differently—whether as a result of Russolo’s impudent emergence on stage, or, in *Il secolo*, “an impulsive man, who makes as if to throw some seats on the stage.”⁵² However, the discordant details do not obscure the similarity of both accounts:

the incendiary gesture of an individual led to the eruption of a crowd.

The final events of Russolo’s “Gran concerto” took place outside the theater and were the most violent of the evening. *Il secolo* dubbed this exploit an “encore in the Galleria”:

Outside the crowd awaits . . . the final events. The Futurists exit in a line, heading toward the piazza del Duomo with a long train of *passatisti*.

The most hotheaded among the latter crowd together outside the Ristorante Savini in the Galleria, where Marinetti has entered with his friends.

Here begins an even livelier and noisier racket. Russolo might have taken this cue for a marvelous symphony in the Futurist style.

Whistles, screams, shouts, curses and eventually imprecations of . . . death! All this cannot fail to attract, from every part of the Galleria and the arcades, an enormous crowd, which, gathering between the octagon and the via Foscolo, discontentedly comments on the emerging scene.⁵³

In the same short paragraphs, which mark a shift of genre from concert review to newspaper report, *Il secolo* detailed the ensuing events: some of the crowd demanded that Marinetti leave the restaurant—a challenge he accepted, accompanied by Boccioni and Carrà. After some initial tussles, the Futurists found themselves outnumbered and retreated; as they disappeared inside the Savini, the restaurant’s shutters crashed shut behind them.⁵⁴

Left in the Galleria and its arcades was an enraged and noisy crowd: the scene recalls

⁵³“Fuori la folla attende . . . gli incidenti finali. I futuristi escono in colonna, dirigendosi verso piazza del Duomo, con un lungo seguito di *passatisti*.”

“Tra questi i più scalmanati si accalcarono davanti al Ristorante Savini in Galleria, dove Marinetti è entrato coi suoi amici.”

“Incomincia qui una gazzarra ancora più vivace, più rumorosa. Russolo in essa avrebbe potuto trovare lo spunto per una meravigliosa sinfonia di marca futurista.”

“Fischi, grida, urla, impropri e persino imprecazioni di . . . morte! Ciò non può a meno di richiamare da ogni parte della Galleria e dei portici una folla enorme che accalcandosi dall’ottagono fino alla via Foscolo commenta poco gaiamente la scenata.” Ibid.

⁵⁴A similar story was told by the *Corriere*; again, there was no clear line between the concert inside and outside the theater: “The show . . . continued on the street.” “Dal Verme, Gli ‘intonarumori futuristi’.” For a strategically similar review, see “Introduzione futurista ed epilogo *passatista*,” *Giornale d’Italia* (22 April 1914).

⁵¹Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1984), 26.

⁵²“Un impulsivo che fa l’atto di gettare delle sedie sul palcoscenico.” “Serata musicale futurista,” 3.

Boccioni's *Rissa in Galleria*, in which the middle classes brawled outside the nearby Caffè Campari. Boccioni represented the crowd through gestures and noises: the outrage caused by squabbling prostitutes gradually swept passersby into a human vortex; alphabetic signals alerted the viewer to the aural consequences of this crowd formation. What had been fashioned into a single scene by Boccioni was thus drawn out over the course of an evening in reviews of Russolo's concert, from the noisy reactions solicited by Russolo's instruments, to fighting in the auditorium, to a near riot under the porticoes of the Galleria. And by returning to this symbolic architectural site, the trajectory of this particular Futurist *serata* might seem to have been preordained—as though Sighele's positivist crowd psychology had become, with the Futurists, an inductive method of agitation, deployable toward a determined end. However, much like Sighele, the critics of Russolo's "Gran concerto" exercised their interpretive faculties in order to read the crowd after the fact—theirs was a common exegetical practice that nevertheless resulted in divergent narratives and multiple first causes of crowd violence: whether the murderous threats shouted in the Galleria, actions on stage or in the auditorium at the Dal Verme, or the *intonarumori*'s decidedly underwhelming noises.

Cameroni's review in *L'Italia* traced crowd violence back even further—before Russolo's concert had even begun. According to this account, preceding even the raising of the curtain, the crowd simmered in various "apostrofi" (apostrophes) of aggressive incitement. These vociferations formed the basis of the reviewer's larger interpretive angle that the evening was a "turlupinatura colossale" (enormous swindle), a verdict sufficiently odious to Russolo that, a few weeks later, he publicly struck the critic across the face.⁵⁵ However, Cameroni's review (easily the most caustic of the lot) did not blame the Futurists for the sham: he held the agitators who had come ready-armed with cakes, potatoes, onions, and courgettes equally respon-

sible (he sardonically observed the incredulity of the fruit and vegetable vendor outside the Dal Verme, whose trade dramatically increased that evening). He also apportioned blame to the theater management for allowing the show to go ahead. Cameroni vented critical ire in various directions, but he nevertheless managed to distribute agency more evenly across various actors, and to avoid the lurking implication (voiced in other reviews) that the *intonarumori*'s noises were mimicked by the audience:

The orchestral players, pulling levers and turning cranks, drew from those howling, vaguely chromatic pipes, dry drumrolls like those of tambourines, gurgles that were supposedly hydraulic; the whole theater burst into Homeric laughter that seemed a prelude to an outburst of good humor, but that little by little, with monotonous and prolonged repetitions for the whole evening of the same noises—intended to reproduce, among other things, the whirling noise of the life of a modern industrial town!—turned into a symphony of whistles, of shouts, of popular choruses, of clashes of every kind, which would have drowned out not only Russolo's spirals, but also the gigantic crashing waterfalls of Niagara.⁵⁶

In Cameroni's account the *intonarumori*'s noises were amusing at first, but the joke went on too long; laughter turned to boredom and irritation. Like the other reviewers, he could not resist drawing parallels between the *intonarumori* and audience noise but made no causal connection between the two—instead, Russolo's instruments were merely ineffectual. Cameroni ridiculed the instruments in a personal attack on their inventor: through derisive bricolage of Russolo's writings, he systematically mangled the names of *intonarumori* ("gurgles that were supposedly hydraulic"), will-

⁵⁵Cameroni, "Il gran concerto futurista al 'Dal Verme'"; see also Gianfranco Maffina, *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori*, 129.

⁵⁶"I professori d'orchestra, premendo leve e rotando manovelle, trassero da quei tubi ululati lontanamente cromatici, rulli secchi come di tamburelle, gorgoglii di intenzione idraulica; tutto il teatro scoppiò in una omerica risata che parve preludere ad un sfogo di buonumore ma che poco a poco, col ripetersi monotono e prolungato per tutta la serata degli stessi rumori—destinati a riprodurre tra altro il turbinoso frastuono della moderna vita industriale cittadina!—si convertì in una sinfonia di sibili, di urli, di cori popolari, di fragori di ogni genere tale da soverchiare non solo le spirali del Russolo ma anche gli scrosci giganti delle cascate del Niagara." Cameroni, "Il gran concerto futurista al 'Dal Verme'."

fully misunderstood Russolo's notion of enharmonicism ("those howling, vaguely chromatic pipes"), and drowned out Russolo's spirals in crowd noises that would have overwhelmed a waterfall—one of the first noises mentioned in "L'arte dei rumori."⁵⁷ Thus Cameroni turned the tables on Russolo, pitting his own manifesto's vocabulary against him; and the implication was clear: Russolo could control neither the symbolic currency of noise nor the voice of the crowd.

By Futurist lights, Cameroni's verdict signaled the failure of this "Gran concerto." Marinetti had wanted Futurism to "sing of the crowd roused up by work, pleasure, or rebellion." But in the reception of this concert the Futurists' encomiastic voice was engulfed by a midsized audience. In three subsequent performances, Russolo's orchestra of *intonarumori* would go on to receive fairer hearings.⁵⁸ Yet lingering at the Milan premiere can dramatize a crucial point: Russolo's noises were at the mercy of their interpreters. Put differently, it was through the theater of interpretation that the noises intoned by Russolo's instruments took on meaning, a process that constantly referred back to the audience-as-crowd, which served as the ultimate horizon of these noises' significance.

To insist that Futurist noise evokes multitudes has various implications for the historiography of musical modernism, complicating the role normally attributed to Russolo in particular. During the twentieth century, Russolo

and his *intonarumori* were recast as the starting point for a variety of musical explorations of noise: composers as diverse as John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer took their aesthetic bearings in relation to him as a mythic origin.⁵⁹ From the 1970s, beginning with the famous writings of Jacques Attali and R. Murray Schafer, theorists of noise have routinely positioned Russolo as the progenitor of an important strain of twentieth-century musical avant-gardism.⁶⁰ However, if Russolo's innovations foreshadow developments that took place much later in twentieth-century music, it is equally possible to hear his noises in their own time, in relation to seething crowds unmistakably modeled on late-nineteenth-century ideas of the masses. What is more, the resonance of these historical masses invites us to reconsider the persistent association of Futurist noise with modernism, as well as the relationship between noise, modernism, and modernity more generally.⁶¹

The broad political resonances of crowd noise have recently been sketched out by historian Stefano Pivato in his study of the twentieth century's soundscape. During that century's first two decades (and throughout the preceding century) Pivato claims that "for the bourgeois mentality, noise evoked disarray, social disorder, and, not infrequently, the specter of social revolution." Noise was, first and foremost, the noise of the rabble—or, heard from

⁵⁷For more on Russolo's enharmonicism (a theme adopted from Pratella's and perhaps Ferruccio Busoni's writings), see Luigi Russolo, "Conquista totale dell'enarmonismo mediante gl'intonarumori futuristi," *Lacerba* (1 Nov. 1913), 242. See also Daniele Lombardi, *Il suono veloce: Futurismo e futurismi in musica* (Milan: Ricordi, 1996), 33–35.

⁵⁸For more information on these concerts, see Payton, "The Music of Futurism," 25–45; and Maffina, *Luigi Russolo e l'arte dei rumori*, 118–30. The reception of Russolo's *intonarumori* at London's Coliseum is discussed in Susan Wilson, "Futurismo e futuristi a Londra dal 1910 al 1914," in Francesco Balilla Pratella, *Edizioni, scritti, manoscritti musicali e futuristi*, ed. Domenico Tampieri (Ravenna: Longo, 1995), 90–94. Some of Pratella's concerts seem to have enjoyed similarly hostile audience dynamics, such as the second performance of his *Musica futurista per orchestra* on 9 March 1913 at Rome's Teatro Costanzi; see Francesco Balilla Pratella, *Testamento: Prima edizione integrale*, ed. Rosetta Berardi and Francesca Serra (Ravenna: Girasole, 2012), 163–68.

⁵⁹See John Cage, "A Composer's Confessions," in *John Cage, Writer: Previously Uncollected Pieces*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), 32; Pierre Schaeffer, "La galleria sotto i suoni, ovvero il futurismo anteriore," *La Biennale di Venezia* 37–38 (1959), 65–71.

⁶⁰Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 136; R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 110–11. The tendency to characterize Russolo as forefather of modernist noise music is, however, much more widespread. For a recent example, see David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile, 2013), 258–60.

⁶¹The relationship between modernist noise and crowds in music history was explored in terms of the "deterritorialization of the people" and "fuzzy assemblages" by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 340–47.

the other side of the picket line, the noise of Italy's self-proclaiming workers' movement: "Socialists, anarchists, republicans, along with other currents in the composite world of the workers' movement now permanently occupied the city's spaces. Once a phenomenon for the elite, politics had assumed mass dimensions and carried militants from taverns and clubs to the open spaces of the city. The crowd of these open spaces—the crowd of 'underdogs'—was beginning to raise its head. And, at the same time, its voice."⁶² Pivato thus concludes his argument that crowd noise was, at base, a political metaphor; drawing loosely on Jacques Attali's *Bruits* (1977), he understands noise as a horizon of social and political contest, albeit one specific to particular places and times.⁶³ Pivato implies that such a historically specific noise can and should be defined in relation to Liberal Italy's ongoing urbanization and industrialization, social processes that brought with them the sights and sounds of workers' demonstrations in city spaces.

These sounds of protest resonate with Futurism's noises as they have been presented in this article, both thematically (as in Marinetti's writings or Boccioni's "Riot") and in performance (in the dynamic interaction between theater audiences and Futurist performers at Russolo's Milanese premiere). To invoke an illustrious critical position, Walter Benjamin's "aestheticization of politics" might account for the *intonarumori's* channeling of protest noises; and it was the Futurists that Benjamin had in mind when he wrote those famous words.⁶⁴ However, such an interpretation might credit the Futurists with too much power: it would miss the elusive, precarious, and at times scarcely audible condition of the movement's noise. For all that the crowd was theoretically enticing, in practice—which in

this context is to say in performance—it nevertheless overwhelmed them.

Ultimately, Futurist noise resides neither in a failed co-option of the "real" crowd presented by the audience nor in the realm of crowd theory: in that potent desire for control over the masses that undergirded both Futurism and the whole enterprise of late-nineteenth-century crowd psychology. However, in the movement *between* these categories—between performance and ideology, protest and authority—a more dynamic and more properly anti-Futurist noise begins to swell. For as the Futurists sought to insert themselves within the crowd through staged, hieroglyphic gestures, the problematic nature of their endeavor was starkly and unceremoniously revealed. They entered into dialogue with a crowd, an unpredictable nexus with its own critical economy, and from there, formal reception and criticism in the press. The Futurists may not have welcomed these critical rejoinders, which could not be foreseen or determined in advance. Yet these oppositional voices were noisiest of all.



Abstract.

In his 1913 manifesto "L'arte dei rumori" (The Art of Noises), Futurist painter Luigi Russolo exhorted readers to "walk across a great modern metropolis with ears more attentive than eyes." For Russolo, attentive listening to the urban environment enacted a visionary aurality: the city was a mine for "new" noises, such as rumbling motors and jolting trams. However, Russolo's embrace of noise—much like that of Futurist painter Umberto Boccioni and Futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti—was undeniably a product of its time and place. This article excavates the sounds of 1913 Milan as a crucial location for the noises of early Italian Futurism. Not only was this city the Futurists' base, but it also inflected their representations of noise both through its symbolic architectural sites (above all the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele) and the buzz of its human multitudes. In this latter respect, late-nineteenth-century positivist crowd psychology can provide an illuminating context because it shares with Futurism the notion of modern, urban crowd united by a collective unconscious—one that could, moreover, be heard by the attentive listener on a city's streets. This article tracks this historical mode of listening from Russolo's manifesto until the reception of his first concert for an entire orchestra of newly wrought

⁶²Stefano Pivato, *Il secolo di rumore: il paesaggio sonoro nel Novecento* (Bologna: Mulino, 2010), 110.

⁶³See Attali, *Noise*, 6–9.

⁶⁴Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," trans. Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room* 39 (2010), 11–37, here 36. An influential reassessment of Benjamin's essay is Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (1992), 3–41.

noise intoners—his “Gran concerto per intonari-mori,” held at Milan’s Teatro Dal Verme in 1914—and explores what was, in this case, a slippery (but critical) distinction between “audience” and “crowd.” Russolo’s clamorously received premiere

forced its listeners and performers to attend to off- (rather than on-) stage noises, thus raising still-vital questions about where to locate Futurism’s noise, influence, and politics. Keywords: futurism, crowd, noise, Milan, Russolo

GAVIN
WILLIAMS
Futurism and
the Politics
of Noise

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE (SPRING 2014)

ARTICLES

CHRISTOPHER MOORE: Lyric Theatre in Béziers, 1898–1910

SINDHUMATHI REVULURI: French Folk Songs and the
Invention of History

FLORA WILLSON: Of Time and the City: Listening to
Don Carlos in 1867 Paris